

Division of Naval History
Ships' Histories Section
Navy Department

HISTORY OF USS RESCUE (AH 18) (EX USS ANTAEUS AS-21, AG-67)

Proudest duty of World War II for USS RESCUE, a Navy hospital ship, was when she rescued more than six thousand Allied prisoners of war while participating in the occupation of Japan.

During the occupation, USS RESCUE took aboard 6,212 prisoners of war from various camps on the Island of Honshu, gave them a thorough physical examination, issued clean clothing, served good food and got rid of the accumulated filth of the prison camps. Seven of every eight brought aboard were transferred to other ships for transportation home. The more critical cases were later transferred to base hospitals or kept aboard for transportation to the United States.

When the ship arrived in San Francisco on 9 October 1945, she had aboard 498 former prisoners of war and enough fleet casualties to make a total of 777 patients.

USS RESCUE has had four lives. Built in 1932 as SS SAINT JOHN, a passenger ship, by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company of Newport News, Virginia, she was employed first in coastwise passenger service on the Atlantic seaboard by the Eastern Steamship Lines. On 17 May 1941, she was placed in commission as a submarine tender, USS ANTAEUS (AS 21).

For the next eighteen months, ANTAEUS operated in the Caribbean. Her duty was to assist in fighting the German submarine menace there. Commander R. S. Morse, USN, was in command. Following this duty, the ship was re-designated AG-67 and was assigned to transport duties. She then began shuttling troops to the Caribbean islands and Panama Canal Zone until her assignment was again changed in December 1944. Commander E. P. Speight, USN, assumed command in January 1944.

During the progress of the war, the speed of operations steadily increased until the older and slower ships were unable to keep up. A faster hospital ship was needed and RESCUE, with her normal cruising speed of 17 knots was one of the answers.

From 28 December 1944, to 23 February 1945, the ship was quickly converted at the New York Navy Yard. She was outfitted with a bed capacity for 792 patients and a medical staff of 17 officers, 25 nurses, eight chief pharmacists and 156 corpsmen. Renamed USS RESCUE (AH 18), she was now a floating hospital, completely equipped for her medical duties and for service as an ambulance ship to carry patients from the scene of battle or fleet action to base hospitals.

Following her trials, USS RESCUE, now commanded by Captain Robert B. Twining, USN (Ret), who had assumed command in October 1944, set course for the operating areas in the Pacific. She first went into action off Okinawa on 13 June 1945. Although another hospital ship, USS COMFORT had been hit by a Japanese suicide plane shortly before, RESCUE came through unscathed, delivering her patients to a hospital on Guam.

On 5 July, following a short overhaul, the hospital ship joined the THIRD Fleet during the carrier strikes and bombardment of the Japanese home islands. She met each task force after its strike and took off patients by rigging breeches buoys. During one night, 10 August, she transferred 39 patients from USS BORIE. Such a transfer is usually only attempted in the day time and under the most favorable conditions, but RESCUE took the men off successfully at night and under battle conditions. At times she took patients aboard from two ships at once, with a carrier discharging patients on the port side and a cruiser on the starboard.

When the fighting ended, RESCUE sailed with the THIRD Fleet into Tokyo Bay. She processed 2,558 prisoners at Maisaka and then began shuttling from the prison camp areas, taking on patients and discharging them at Yokohama. At Shiogama she picked up 3,654 from the Sondai area, including British, American, Australian, Indian and Chinese nationals.

On 8 September 1945, Commander Leo C. Keating, USNR, assumed command of RESCUE. On 23 September, the ship arrived in Guam and, after discharging a few prisoners whose home had been on Guam, she proceeded to San Francisco, where her repatriates saw the United States again, some for the first time since the beginning of the war.

By a directive of June 1946, RESCUE was sold through the War Shipping Administration.

USS RESCUE (AH 18) earned two Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon for participating in the following operations:

- 1 Star/Assault and Occupation of Okinawa Gunto -- 13 - 19 June 1945
- 1 Star/THIRD Fleet Operations against Japan -- 10 July - 15 August 1945

The ship also earned the Navy Occupation Service Medal for Pacific duty 2-22 September 1945.

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	403 feet	BEAM	61 feet
DISPLACEMENT	5,518 tons	SPEED	20 knots

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